

## Audio file

[Education Matters Laura Shergold.mp3](#)

### Transcript

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to education matters with your host sajda and ellit in our shore, we aim to open education to everyone. We do this through conversations with inspiring.

00:00:21 Speaker 1

And guests and experts who share their educational journeys we aspire to raise awareness of a variety of educational opportunities that will enhance your skill set and support you to pursue lifelong ambitions and career goals.

00:00:35 Speaker 2

If you want to be in a position where you can influence society, think about empowering yourself through education.

00:00:42 Speaker 2

Education is important to every stage of life as it supports communities and leads to positive changes in the words of the great legend, Nelson Mandela's education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change.

00:00:53 Speaker 1

World stay tuned as we demystify education jargon so that learners from all backgrounds can continue to thrive and achieve personal success.

00:01:03 Speaker 1

Education is a lifelong journey where all students, each episode we are both sharing our knowledge and learning from our guests, so TuneIn to education matters because education.

00:01:14 Speaker 1

Really does matter.

00:01:16 Speaker 2

Also, if you want to be involved or share your thoughts on the topics discussed.

00:01:20 Speaker 2

Leave a comment we'd love.

00:01:21 Speaker 2

To hear from you.

00:01:26 Speaker 3

Hi we're now joined by Laura. Thank you so much for joining us. She's an undergraduate admissions officer. And so Laura, thank you again for joining us. You're welcome.

00:01:38 Speaker 3

So can you tell us a bit about your role?

00:01:41 Speaker 4

Yeah. So I'm an undergraduate admissions officer currently working at Lancaster University.

00:01:48 Speaker 4

So in my role I do a lot of looking at UCAS applications that come through to us. And so I will sort of look at an application.

00:01:58 Speaker 4

Make a decision on when they're, whether they're suitable to to study with us on our programmes.

00:02:05 Speaker 4

That's the the kind of crux of it, really. But it involves a lot more behind behind.

00:02:10 Speaker 4

That but the.

00:02:11 Speaker 4

The key thing is making decisions on people that want to come.

00:02:14 Speaker 4

And study with us.

00:02:17 Speaker 3

That's great. Thank you. So could you give us an overview of the application process to universities?

Yeah. So undergraduate students apply through UCAS, which is a common application system essentially.

00:02:34 Speaker 4

So students can have five choices. UM, so they can apply to the same course at 5 different universities. They might apply to a couple of different courses at various different universities, or some people are so sure they want to study in one or two particular places that they'll apply for multiple courses.

00:02:53 Speaker 4

Just one or two universities.

00:02:58 Speaker 4

So usually if an applicant is applying through their school they get set like an internal deadline, but students that apply by the January deadline are guaranteed fair and equal consideration. So we will look at all applications that basically come through.

00:03:17 Speaker 4

UM for?

00:03:19 Speaker 4

Whether that that comes in October or whether it comes in.

00:03:26 Speaker 4

They we treat them all the same. The the only key difference is there is an earlier deadline for students who are interested in things like medicine that Henry and I think dentistry as well and and obviously applying to Oxford and Cambridge.

00:03:51 Speaker 4

And then as part of the application process, once the university makes a decision on an application, they'll either give a student an offer or it may be that they have to say sorry, your application has been unsuccessful. Once a student hears back from all of their.

00:04:09 Speaker 4

University choices. They will then be asked to make a firm and an insurance choice. So this is basically narrowing down from 5 to your top two choices.

00:04:21 Speaker 4

So typically, UM students will put their firm choice as the place that they really want to go and and and is like, you know, the the number one top pick and then the insurance choice should also be somewhere where the student wants to go and. And typically students will select an offer that is.

00:04:42 Speaker 4

Of a slightly lower requirement, so it's almost like the the kind of the backup choice.

00:04:47 Speaker 4

For some students.

00:04:50 Speaker 3

Some students might be worried about how impartial the application process is. Could you tell us a bit about what you look at when you get an application?

00:04:58 Speaker 4

Yeah, of course. So obviously different universities will look at things slightly different way and probably even each individual admissions officer will look at things slightly differently.

00:05:10 Speaker 4

But the the.

00:05:10 Speaker 4

Kind of standard way that I look at applications and the way that we look at them at the university I work at is.

00:05:18 Speaker 4

We are viewing applications holistically, so we are taking into account a student's academic background. So that includes both any qualifications that they're working towards.

00:05:30 Speaker 4

So, like if they're working towards a levels or they're studying B.Tech or that.

00:05:34 Speaker 4

Type of thing.

00:05:36 Speaker 4

And we'll look at any previous qualifications they've got. So things.

00:05:39 Speaker 4

Like UM, GCSEs UM \*\*\*\*\* if they've taken them, uhm, extended project qualifications, all that type of thing will we'll have a look at. We will have a quick look at a reference and a personal.

00:05:56 Speaker 4

So the reference we would typically expect to come from your most recent educational institution. So like your school or your sixth form where you've been studying a levels or your btech or an equivalent qualification like that and.

00:06:15 Speaker 4

We we will have a quick look at your personal statement, which will usually be a piece of writing that you do.

00:06:26 Speaker 4

That basically tells the universities why you want to study what you want to study, and perhaps what you think will make you make you a good student.

00:06:37 Speaker 4

So different universities will use these different pieces of information in slightly different ways. Some universities will just be doing.

00:06:45 Speaker 4

Kind of a quick glance at a personal statement and reference. UM, I'm focusing purely on the academic side of things and the predicted grades or achieved grades.

00:06:55 Speaker 4

And other universities or sometimes particular courses will be looking in more detail at kind of things mentioned in a personal statement or a reference as part of their selection process.

00:07:09 Speaker 4

And then there are also a number of things that we will have a look at as part of the initial review of an application that aren't necessarily academic in nature and they don't necessarily impact on a on whether a student will get into university or not, but.

00:07:28 Speaker 4

Help they help the university work out either how to, UM, determine you know how to categorise the students.

00:07:37 Speaker 4

So maybe what fee status they fall into, so how much they'll be charged? Or it might be, you know, what kind of support we can give that student.

00:07:49 Speaker 4

Or whether they're eligible for any kind of contextual offer schemes and that type of thing. So there's a lot of information on a UCAS application and it can get used in various different ways. So.

00:08:05 Speaker 4

As with any application form, you obviously will fill in various details about yourself and they'll ask you, you know your name and your address and maybe your nationality and all this type of thing.

00:08:16 Speaker 4

So some of that information is used purely if we want to contact you and other bits of that information.

00:08:25 Speaker 4

It is used or I use it when I'm looking at a student's fee status. When I work out whether someone is home for fees or whether they are international fees, we will make decisions on students who come to us from a wide range.

00:08:42 Speaker 4

Of backgrounds and countries, and with so many different qualifications, it's impossible to list them all, but we have to kind of basically categorise students and just mark up whether they'll be home or international for fees. So the key things that impact that type of decision.

00:09:02 Speaker 4

Are looking at someone's nationality looking at whether they are currently in the UK or.

00:09:08 Speaker 4

Whether they're overseas.

00:09:09 Speaker 4

These, and they're kind of where it looks like they are ordinary residents where they're living essentially. So for that purpose, I know that sometimes the way you cast words can be a little bit tricky and confusing. But as an example, where they ask for details about your nationality.

00:09:32 Speaker 4

They are looking very much at what type of passport do you have rather than how you identify yourself. Like what your ethnicity is.

00:09:43 Speaker 4

So that's one thing to kind of be aware of when you're filling out your application, it will be a university, will be wanting to know what your nationality is in the sense.

00:09:53 Speaker 4

Of what? Uhm, what? Your passport is what your immigration status is, rather than what your ethnicity is. So that comes into account for both fee state.

00:10:04 Speaker 4

And for university, working out whether they need to issue you a visa and so that's that is one thing.

00:10:12 Speaker 1

Sorry, just a quick question.

00:10:14 Speaker 3

When when you say?

00:10:15 Speaker 3

Home fees and you're not referring to whether or not a student is living at home.

00:10:20 Speaker 3

Are you? You're you're referring home? Yeah.

00:10:24 Speaker 4

So the the the UK Government basically has a set of rules and regulations.

00:10:30 Speaker 4

And they say universities you can charge people this one cheaper fee or this more expensive fee if they're international.

00:10:39 Speaker 4

So the UK Government has a complicated set of rules about what counts as a home student. So in that sense it has nothing to do with whether you're going to be living at home, whether you're going to be living on campus accommodation.

00:10:53 Speaker 4

Or anything of that sort. It's purely saying.

00:10:58 Speaker 4

You're you're a.

00:10:59 Speaker 4

UK fee payer essentially, so you will pay a cheaper rate because you're a UK based student essentially rather than saying.

00:11:11 Speaker 4

Yeah, rather than being your international, you'll be paying higher fees. So it doesn't matter where you are.

00:11:18 Speaker 4

Living or whether you're living with your parents or whether you're not living with your parents or that type of thing does that. Does that help explain?

00:11:26 Speaker 3

Yes, that was great. Thank you. If if students have got any sort of wondering themselves, is there somebody they can contact and that you would recommend contacting in the universities?

00:11:38 Speaker 4

Yeah. So if they've got questions about any, anything of that sort of thing to do with kind of EFV status or immigration?

00:11:47 Speaker 4

Like oh, this is my nationality, am I going to need a visa or or I've been living here for a really long time. I've got this type of immigration status I would recommend.

00:11:58 Speaker 4

There's two things I would recommend actually. So the UK Council for International Student Affairs so often known as U keeser.

00:12:07 Speaker 4

So UK CIS A they have lots of really helpful information that makes that makes the complicated kind of rules.

00:12:17 Speaker 4

A lot more understandable and accessible to interpret. So that's one good place to just get a general overview of the information and what things might.

00:12:26 Speaker 4

I mean and then the second piece of advice is, UM, just to contact any admissions, any universities you're interested in, contact their admissions teams and they'll be happy to help give you some advice on on how you can navigate what some of these bits of information mean.

00:12:46 Speaker 3

That's great. That's really helpful. Thank you. And you mentioned also universities being able to see certain things on application.

00:12:53 Speaker 3

And so they can offer support. Yeah. Does this mean during the admissions process and admissions tutors can see whether or not you've got a disability or health condition or any contextual information about about your application? Yeah. So. So that is something that we will have a look at in.

00:13:13 Speaker 4

The initial kind of review of your application, if you choose to declare these bits of information, so information in this regards is often kind of.

00:13:24 Speaker 4

Students can volunteer to provide this information. If you do have a disability or a long standing health condition, I would encourage you to include that on your UCAS application because that will often mean that a universities kind of disability service team is.

00:13:44 Speaker 4

Be able to pick that up and get in touch with the student and advise on UM, you know to to work out what kind of support that student might need and what kind of support the university can reasonably put into into place.

00:13:59 Speaker 4

That type of information will rarely form part of a decision on whether a student is going to receive an offer, so some really common things that we see that will will have sort of very little impact that I don't really kind of give much of a second kind of glance to are things like if a student.

00:14:18 Speaker 4

As UM, you know, maybe they've had some mental health difficulties. Maybe they've got dyslexia or they've just got kind of some kind of chronic health condition, that kind of thing won't affect whether you get an offer.

00:14:31 Speaker 4

But it is useful to put on your UCAS application so that the university can help kind of put things in place to support you, so that is is not necessarily something that admissions tutors will pay huge amounts of attention to, but it's something at at Lancaster.

00:14:51 Speaker 4

It's something that will in due course trigger the disabilities team to get in touch with you.

00:15:00 Speaker 3

Thankfully gets really helpful.

00:15:04 Speaker 4

I was just going to say another thing on that kind of topic is there are various bits of information we see on your UCAS application that will include things like a polar for quintile area or kind of other pieces of contextual information like whether someone has been looked after in the care system.

00:15:26 Speaker 4

That kind of information again, it's not held against you.

00:15:29 Speaker 4

In any way.

00:15:31 Speaker 4

It is really more of a case of some universities will have a contextual office scheme.

00:15:38 Speaker 4

So for example, at at Lancaster we have a contextual office scheme and we'll take into account information like whether someone's been in the care system.



00:15:47 Speaker 4

Or whether they are from a polar 4 quintile 1 background and if they are, we can include them in our contextual offer scheme, which means we can be more flexible with our entry requirements.

00:16:00 Speaker 4

And and kind of you know try and give them a bit of support and level out the the playing field a little bit and to kind of help give access to students from backgrounds where we know things have been perhaps.

00:16:12 Speaker 4

More challenging for some of those students than you know, maybe maybe a a stereotypical kind of university student.

00:16:21 Speaker 3

Just to mention what the polar 4 Quintiles are, so and last and on our last show we spoke to Jake Brown about access programmes and that's also a measure that we look at when we look at access programmes.

00:16:35 Speaker 3

So Polar 4 is a it's a quintile of participation to higher education. So it's based on a data set.

00:16:42 Speaker 3

And and we don't expect students to know this. There is a post code checker. So you put your post code in and it it checks it for you. You don't need to know that prior to applying to university.

00:16:52 Speaker 3

And Laurie, you mentioned personal statements and could you give us a bit more information about about personal statements and your top tips for for writing them as well, please?

00:17:02 Speaker 4

Yeah, of course. So, UM, as I think I briefly mentioned earlier.

00:17:08 Speaker 4

Every university will look at them slightly differently, and it may vary depending on which course you're applying to as to what you need to put in your personal statement. So most generally speaking, the personal statement is.

00:17:23 Speaker 4

A. A place where applicants will kind of tell us about why they want to study what they want to study.

00:17:31 Speaker 4

So they tell us about their interests, their passion, their motivation, and students will often talk about transferable skills and the experience they've got. That's.

00:17:43 Speaker 4

Either relevant to the course they're applying for.

00:17:46 Speaker 4

So you know, if they're interested in say umm, something in the health field, maybe they've done some work experience.

00:17:53 Speaker 4

They've done some shadowing or you know same thing for. If they're interested in kind of social work or childcare, maybe they've done some relevant volunteering in that type of area, working with younger kids, that type of thing, that is all.

00:18:06 Speaker 4

Often quite useful for particular courses, but it's useful in general as well because it helps to demonstrate that a student is kind of well-rounded. They've got some transferable skills and they've done they've done more than just sit in a classroom, essentially.

00:18:24 Speaker 4

In terms of how you write a personal statement, there is loads of information and resources online on various different websites.

00:18:33 Speaker 4

I know that UCAS will have information and various other other resources like that. Often schools will help students with these.

00:18:44 Speaker 4

They can be formulaic, but they don't need to be so kind of the key things are.

00:18:50 Speaker 4

Telling, telling universities why you're interested in what you want to.

00:18:53 Speaker 4

Study so if.

00:18:55 Speaker 4

You wanna study maths? You just say you you kind of get across that you really love maths and This is why you want to study maths and if you've got a career goal then you can include that in there so you know if you wanted to be someone.

00:19:11 Speaker 4

That was working in a particular kind of finance field or something. You might mention that you might think, oh, this type.

00:19:16 Speaker 4

Of this type of law, this type of finance, this type of whatever, is really interesting and I can see a career path in this. Then you can weave that into your personal statement.

00:19:28 Speaker 4

I think if there's anything else to kind of explain about personal statements there.

00:19:28

Thank you.

00:19:36 Speaker 4

I think that probably covers the the key things that there are, and I know that sometimes schools can go into.

00:19:44 Speaker 4

You a lot of detail about personal statements. Some universities will, you know, spend only a couple of minutes looking at a personal statement and other universities will pour over them with a lot more kind of scrutiny.

00:20:01 Speaker 4

So it does depend a little bit on each university you're applying to. So what's probably a good idea?

00:20:07 Speaker 4

Is getting in touch with any universities you're interested in and just checking if there's anything particular they're looking for, because if you're needing to be reflective on a particular type of experience, you've got.

00:20:21 Speaker 4

Then that's something that's crucial to build in. But if they just want to know you're interested, then then you can be a bit more flexible with the the word and the character limit because you don't have a huge amount of space for your personal statement.

00:20:35 Speaker 3

Great. Thank you. And some of our listeners might volunteer at madrassas and working with younger children or volunteering on community projects through their mosques.

00:20:44 Speaker 3

And is this something that you would recommend including in your personal statement?

00:20:48 Speaker 4

Yeah, definitely. So a bit of that will depend you know, on the courses you're interested in, but it is worth if you've got the space.

00:20:57 Speaker 4

Including it, whatever course you're interested.

00:21:00 Speaker 4

It helps to demonstrate umm some of your transferable skills. Just some of your life experience in general. If you can link the experience that you've got through through some of your kind of volunteering or you're working with kind of younger children. If any of that relates specifically to the course that you're doing.

00:21:21 Speaker 4

And you can find a way to link that. That would be really useful and and something that is is really good. Good to see in your personal statement. So for.

00:21:29 Speaker 4

Example If if someone was interested in being a teacher in the future and you've had experience at a madrassa working with younger students, that's exactly the kind of information that would be fantastic to include in a personal statement.

00:21:45 Speaker 4

But if you're doing something a bit more general, say you're going to study, maybe history, maybe English literature.

00:21:50 Speaker 4

It, even if it's not relevant to the course, you're going to be studying, it still helps to demonstrate that you're a well-rounded student and that you've got experience beyond the classroom.

00:22:04 Speaker 3

State personal statements. I guess it's a way of kind.

00:22:07 Speaker 3

Of introducing yourself to the university and to to the admissions tutors.

00:22:12 Speaker 4

Yeah, exactly, exactly. It's a great way to kind of introduce yourself.

00:22:16 Speaker 4

And it's almost so I don't know whether whether anyone will listening will have sort of a part time job.

00:22:23 Speaker 4

Maybe they've had to to kind of produce a CV and a cover letter, and certainly in your in your future career as part of job applications, you'll have to often write a con.

00:22:33 Speaker 4

The letter that goes alongside your application, so I often think of the personal statement as being a lot like a cover letter. It's it's a way that you have an opportunity to to really try and sell yourself essentially.

00:22:52 Speaker 3

And sort of.

00:22:55 Speaker 3

On the on the note really, what are the three most important things for applying when applying to university?

00:23:02 Speaker 4

OK, so so there's that I've there's so many different things that that I think are important to consider. But one of my top things to consider is kind of before you even get to the the process of filling out your your application is to choose a university or a course.

00:23:22 Speaker 4

Well, and or really that suits you and is a good fit to you. So if you.

00:23:30 Speaker 4

If you if you know you really want a big city life, then maybe applying to a campus university won't be as good a fit to applying to a university that is centrally based in a city.

00:23:44 Speaker 4

So it's making sure it's going to be somewhere that is that meets your your kind of needs and your wants and that you're going to be comfortable.

00:23:52 Speaker 4

The end of the day you'll you'll be studying somewhere for sort of 3-4 years, depending on whether you do placements, whether you do kind of a a study abroad and kind of placement umm so you need to be comfortable with wherever it is that you're going to universe.

00:24:09 Speaker 4

And and then when it comes to your actual application, demonstrating your interest in your chosen course is a big one.

00:24:19 Speaker 4

And that's, I would say that's the biggest thing that I look for alongside kind of predicted grades really. So definitely try and get across.

00:24:29 Speaker 4

About whatever it is in your subject that excites you. If you can get that into your personal statement, that's going to be fantastic.

00:24:36 Speaker 4

Uhm, and then the the third kind of tip I have is basically to include all of your qualifications on your application, so this will include things like if you've done, whether this is kind of school based, things like doing an extended project, or whether it's you've just done.

00:24:57 Speaker 4

Kind of. Maybe you've done some things outside of school. It might be you've done Duke of Edinburgh. Maybe you've.

00:25:03 Speaker 4

Done. Kind of dance qualifications. You can put all of this type of thing on your application and another one that is particularly relevant, at least for me, when I'm looking at applications is if if you've done, say, a heritage language qualification, if you've.

00:25:24 Speaker 4

Particularly if you're, if your parents are are kind of from another country and you've had the opportunity to study that language as as an A level or a GC and maybe you've done that before taking your A levels.

00:25:39 Speaker 4

Then then that's a fantastic thing to put in. Some universities will be able to use use things like a heritage language, a level as meeting part of their academic entry requirements.

00:25:51 Speaker 4

So it's definitely important to put things on there. If you have studied them, there are some kind of qualifications that maybe universities won't necessarily include.

00:26:01 Speaker 4

In an offer, but the you know, if you've, if you've done a qualification, put it on your application. You never know what's going to be used for those. Those universities kind of looking at your applications basically.

00:26:16 Speaker 3

That was great. That was really helpful. Thank you, Laura. So basically the application process, everything you've done, any, any qualifications, anything you've done outside of school, get that on there, get on the personal statement, get that in the application process where it says put in your qualifications.

00:26:36 Speaker 3

And I guess it's also applying to the university that you want to go to as well and and having that sort of aspirational university and also that insurance one as well.

00:26:45 Speaker 4

Yeah, that's a huge thing. And another thing that I will mention is that I know applying to university can often feel like big and scary.

00:26:56 Speaker 4

And obviously every university will have their own set of entry reqs.

00:27:01 Speaker 4

Assignments and every different student will be looking at different things when they're applying to university. They'll be looking at different courses.

00:27:08 Speaker 4

They'll be looking at different universities. One thing that I would like you to be aware of and to remember is at the end of the day, the admission staff at the university, they are human.

00:27:22 Speaker 4

They're not trying to make life difficult for you. They want to work with you, particularly Lancaster. We we like to be supportive of the students that we talk to, whether that.

00:27:33 Speaker 4

During the application stage or before the application stage, UM and so you know, we want to make sure someone's going to be a good fit for you, but we also know that students change their minds and there can be any number of reasons for that. So various things that we will kind of discuss with.

00:27:53 Speaker 4

Students after they submit the initial application form. I just want you to be aware of. You can change your mind about things so.

00:28:02 Speaker 4

We get students that might change their mind about the course they want to study. If you do that, just get in touch with the universities you've applied to.

00:28:10 Speaker 4

Often you may be able to change the course after you've applied, particularly if you think, Oh no, I still want to study at this university, but maybe I just want this slightly different variant of this type of course.

00:28:21 Speaker 4

Get in touch with the universities. If UM, if your circumstances change. Whether this is kind of like a.

00:28:30 Speaker 4

Either you've just changed your mind, or maybe your home situation has changed. If there are any kind of mitigating circumstances or there's an illness, or a bereavement or anything like that, get in touch with the universities you've applied to and let them know, and it may be that they can take.

00:28:50 Speaker 4

Some of that information into consideration or that they've got a policy in a form that you fill out and then they can they can take, take care of things like that and and give a bit of consideration to some of those circumstances.

00:29:07 Speaker 3

Exactly that. And I'm hoping that any of our listeners hearing you, they'll they'll see how welcoming and friendly admissions staff are.

00:29:15 Speaker 3

They're not this robot, and and you're very approachable. Your whole team is incredibly approachable. And so just to reiterate what you said and reach out to those missions teams, and if you have any queries.

00:29:27 Speaker 3

Or you have something in your circumstances that change anything that might be extenuating circumstances. Let universities know as soon as possible.

00:29:36 Speaker 4

Exactly. And. And if you're, if you're kind of worried about something.

00:29:42 Speaker 4

And you're not sure whether it's worth mentioning to a university just, you know, give us a ring or give any university a ring or an e-mail and and just have a bit of a discussion.

00:29:52 Speaker 4

And I know often you might be thinking, oh, I'm probably the only person in this kind of circumstance. It is highly, highly likely that you are not the only person in that circumstance.

00:30:03 Speaker 4

And we've probably heard something similar before, and it may be we're quite used to dealing with particular types of situations.

00:30:11 Speaker 4

So yeah, just just get in touch. The the worst that can happen is someone will say, oh, no, that's not going to make a.

00:30:18 Speaker 4

But it might be there are several universities that will say, OK, well what you need to do next is this, this, this and this. And actually we can be flexible or we can take this into consideration so.

00:30:31 Speaker 4

People don't necessarily want to say no. Sometimes it's just a case of working through various kind of policies and procedures. But generally speaking, people want to be friendly and helpful where they can.

00:30:44 Speaker 3

Thank you so much. And this was really useful interview and and thank you for joining us. Laura. You're welcome.

00:30:51 Speaker 4

Thanks for having me.